

# **CBCI OFFICE FOR SCHEDULED CASTES AND BACKWARD CLASSES**

## **BIENNIAL REPORT (2016-2017)**

### **OFFICE-BEARERS**

**Chairperson** Most Rev. Dr. A. Neethinathan, Bishop of Chingleput

**Members:** Most Rev. Vincent Barwa (Simdega)

Most Rev. Sarat Chandra Nayak (Berhampur)

**Secretary:** Rev. Fr. Devasagayaraj Zackarias

### **VISION & MISSION**

#### VISION

- To empower Dalits, Backward Classes
- To organize and to build inclusive communities.

#### MISSION

- To coordinate,
- To inspire and
- To animate the Regional Commissions

#### Content:

- I. Introduction
- II. SC Rights of the Dalit Christians
- III. Meetings, Seminars, Trainings, and Awards
- IV. Special events
- V. Challenges
- VI. Future Plans
- VII. Conclusion

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The CBCI Office for SC/BC is pleased to present its biennial (2016-2017) report to the Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India. The struggle for equal rights to the Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin, continued with new strategies. Our Office played a great role in helping the Bishops to come out with the Dalit Empowerment Policy in the Church. Considerable effort had gone into the preparation by way of consultations in the different regions and different stakeholders. Animation, inspiration and coordination programs were conducted for empowerment of Dalit Christians. The CBCI Office for SC/BC has also pursued its aims and objectives in the larger arena by way of active interaction with some National Dalit organizations and international organizations.

### **I. Draft preparation, approval, release, and dissemination of Dalit Empowerment Policy**

#### **1. Drafting of the CBCI Dalit Policy:**

Dalit Christians constitute major component of the Catholic Church of India. They have been and are trying to live out their faith as believers in Christ and the Church. They have also been trying to live as the true citizens of the country. But they continue to be excluded, discriminated and dehumanized. They were and are victims of multiple social and religious discriminations. They were and are kept as untouchables, polluted and forced to do the traditional, menial and unclean occupations. Their struggle for being constitutionally recognized as Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin has not been materialized. It is in this background a Committee of Bishops was appointed to draft the Policy, which would be taken up for discussion in the next Standing Committee Meeting (April 27-29 2016).

#### **2. Release of the CBCI Dalit Empowerment Policy**

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) promulgated of the "Policy of Dalit Empowerment in the Catholic Church in India" on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2016 at 4.30 pm at the CBCI Centre, 1, Ashok Road, Near Gole Dakkhana, New Delhi -1.

The Catholic Church has been working for the development of the Dalits, who are in majority in the church, all these years through education and other social development programs. Through the CBCI Dalit policy the Catholic Church in India recommits itself to empower the Dalits through systematic and scientific approach and well established mechanism. It is our hope that the CBCI Dalit policy will change the lives of many Dalits in the Catholic Church. We wish that it will also show clearly to the civil society the affirmative stand on the side of the poor and the marginalized i.e. the Dalits and the other marginalized groups.

#### **3. Launching of Dalit policy:**

The Policy of Dalit Empowerment in the Catholic Church in India was officially released on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2016 in New Delhi. The mega launch of this Dalit Policy took place at Indian Social Institute (ISI), Bangalore on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2017 by Most Rev. Neethinathan, Chairperson, Bishop of the CBCI Office for Dalits and Backward Classes. Most Rev. Joseph Raja Rao

Thelegathoti, S.M.M. Bishop of Vijayawada, Most Rev. D. Prakasam, Bishop of Nellore, Most Rev. Antony Poola, Bishop of Kurnool, Most Rev. P. Soundararaju, SDB, Bishop of Vellore

Most Rev. Thomas Paulsamy, Bishop of Dindigul, Chairman, TNBC, SC/ST Commission, Most Rev. Jayarao Palimera, Bishop of Eluru, Chairman, TCBC, SC/ST Commission, Most Rev. Thomas Dabre, Bishop of Poona were present.

Regional and diocesan secretaries of the SC/ST commissions, priests, religious, Dalit Christian leaders from different parts of India were present for this historical program.

The CBCI Dalit policy clearly spells the stand of the Official Catholic India regarding the Dalits. It declares untouchability as a grave social sin and any of its form should be completely stopped. It also speaks about empowerment of Dalit Christians through educational, employment, economic and entrepreneurship programs. The aim of the policy is to bring about an equitable church in India without any caste discrimination.

#### **4. Release of Dalit policy in Tamil:**

The CBCI Dalit Policy was released in Tamil on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2017 at Loyola College, Chennai. The event was organized by Tamil Nadu ST/ST/BC Commission and Chingleput diocese coordinated by Fr. Bagya Regis the Vicar General of the diocese. Most Rev. A. M Chinnappa, the Emeritus of Madras- Mylapore and the Founder of Society of the Kingdom of God, Most Rev. Neethinathan, Chairperson, CBCI Office for SC/BC, Most Rev. Thomas Paulsamy, Chairperson, TNBC Commission for SC/ST/BC, Most Rev. Soundaraju, Bishop of Vellore, Rev. Fr. Devasagayaraj, Secretary, CBCI Office for SC/BC, Rev. Fr. Arulanandam, VG of Archdiocese of Pondicherry – Cuddalore.

Fr. Maria Arul Raja, SJ explained about the Dalit policy in detail. He said that the Dalit policy is for empowering Dalits and to build the God's kingdom, which is the heartbeat of Jesus by uniting all Christians.

#### **5. Release of Dalit policy in Malayalam:**

The CBCI Dalit Policy was released in Malayalam by His Eminence Cardinal Cleemis on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2017. A package of 15 crores has been announced by the Kerala bishops to build houses for 300 Dalit Christian families in Kerala. These houses would be built in the course of three years. Thanks to the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Conference and to the Regional secretary Fr. Shaj

CBCI Policy No. 96.C. says, *“Efforts will be made to appoint competent and enthusiastic Dalit priests as secretaries for the SC/ST/BC commissions at the regional and diocesan levels. A lay Dalit person will also be appointed as Joint Secretary”*. According to the above, the KCBC (Kerala Catholic Bishops' Conference) appointed Mr James Elavumkal as the Joint Secretary of SC/ST Commission to the Kerala Region. Congratulations to him.

## **6. Meeting with Arturo Sosa, Superior General of the Society of Jesus:**

On 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2017 Fr. Devasagayaraj, Secretary along with Sr. Robancy, Program Coordinator, CBCI Office for the Dalits and Backward Classes handed the CBCI Dalit Policy to Fr. Arturo Sosa the superior general of Jesuit congregation at ISI Delhi with Fr. Denzil the director, Also it was presented to Fr. Vernon D'Cunha, Regional Assistant for South Asia and to Fr. Tomasz Kot, Regional Assistant for Central and Eastern Europe. The Superior General promised that the priority of the Jesuits is to network with the likeminded organisations to empower the poor and the marginalised.

## **7. Consultation Meet and Launching of the Revamped Website, Release of Dalit Policy in Hindi and Release of the Audio CD of the Dalit Policy**

Consultation on SC status for Dalit Christians was jointly organized by NCCI and CBCI on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2017 at CBCI Centre, New Delhi with the Christians leaders in Delhi. The objective of the meeting was to discuss about the strategy for getting SC Status for Dalit Christians. There were 25 leaders from different organizations and churches who participated in the consultation. The status of the case in the Supreme Court is static and there is no progress in the formation of the bench for the case CWP 180/2004.

On the part of the Government it is very clear that there is no political will to give SC status to Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims rather ideologically the ruling party at the center is against granting SC status to Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims. There is no point in waiting till the end of the tenure of the present Government but to proceed with the case in the Supreme. It is the need of the hour to prepare for the case with valid arguments.

In the Advocacy level, creating public opinion about the religious freedom of the Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims need to be strengthened. It is not just the reservation issue. While building up relations with the Hindu leaders, Hindu Gurus like Ravi Shankar with Intellectuals, and to lobby with them and continue the lobby works with UN bodies.

While lobbying with the SC Hindus and their leaders like Mr. Paswan, Mr. Udit Raj and Ms. Mayavati etc it is needed also to bring the issue to the mainstream media.

## **8. Revamping of Website, Release of the audio on CBCI Dalit policy and Hindi Translation**

The revamped website of our office was launched by Most Rev. Theodore the Secretary General of CBCI on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2017 at CBCI Centre, New Delhi. The Dalit Policy in Hindi was released by Monsignor Susai Sebastin the Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Delhi and received by Mr. Chinnappan the Secretary General of the AICU. The Audio CD of Dalit Policy was released by Mr. John Dayal the well-known Christian Journalist and received by Mr. Edward Joseph, a Dalit Christian youth.

## **9. Workshop on CBCI Dalit Policy by TCBC:**

A two day workshop on CBCI Dalit Policy was organized by the SC/ST/BC commission of Telugu Bishops' Catholic Council (TCBC) at Jothir Mai Social work centre, Secunderabad on 20-21 May 2017. Mr. Elisha Kumar, Regional Secretary of SC/ST/BC commission of TCBC organized the meeting. Around 60 representatives from the two states namely Andhra Pradesh and Telangana consisting of 13 dioceses participated in the workshop. The CBCI Dalit Policy was discussed in detail and the participants came out with suggestions of action plans for their dioceses as well as for the Region which have to be approved by the Regional Bishops' Conference as well as by the individual dioceses.

Most Rev. Jayarao Polimera the Chairperson of the SC/ST/BC commission of the TCBC said that he would take the CBCI Dalit Policy forward with the cooperation of the regional bishops and involvement of the lay leaders. Fr. Devasagayaraj explained the action plan and the implementation of the Dalit policy the participants

## **10. Dalit Policy copies to Major & Provincial Superiors:**

Policy of Dalit Empowerment in the Catholic Church in India (an ethical Imperative to Build Inclusive Communities) was sent to all the congregations superior Generals, Provincials of India on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2017. They are around 500 of them. The policy was sent with the letter of the Chairperson Bishop, Most Rev. Neethinathan requesting them to have concrete action plans in promotion of vocation and Education etc.

## **11. One Day Workshop in the Southern States on the Dissemination and implementation of CBCI Dalit Policy**

One day Workshop on CBCI Dalit Policy on the dissemination and implementation for the Southern states at Indian Social Institute, Bangalore was conducted on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2017. 34 representatives from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu Telangana participated in the workshop.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India released the Dalit Policy for the Catholic Church in India in December 2016. Before December 2017 each region and diocese is supposed to come out with its action plan for the empowerment of Dalits based on the CBCI Dalit Policy. The workshop was to discuss about the ways of dissemination of the CBCI Dalit Policy up to the grassroots level and to help the regions and dioceses to chart out its plans for the empowerment of the Dalits within the Catholic Church. Fr. Selva SJ the director of ISI conducted the workshop. The Regional and diocesan SC/ST/BC commission secretaries and members participated in the workshop. Fr. Cosmon Arockiaraj the former secretary to the CBCI Office for SC/BC gave his concluding remarks. He said that the CBCI Dalit Policy should be considered as the Constitution of the Indian Catholic Church. He also cautioned that the dioceses or regions should not follow the piecemeal approach, announcing certain welfare schemes while implementing the Dalit Policy, rather it should be holistic.

It was decided to train experts who will go around the dioceses to speak to the priests and people about the policy its importance and the ways to implement the Policy.

## **12. Implementation of Dalit Policy:**

On 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2017, the CRI unit of Eluru diocese organized a meeting in which Fr. Devasagayaraj, the national secretary was invited to speak about the implementation of the Dalit policy. Most Rev. Jayarao Polimera the Chairperson of the SC/ST/BC commission of the TCBC sought the cooperation of the religious to implement the CBCI Dalit Policy in Eluru diocese.

## **13. One Day Seminar on CBCI Dalit Policy-:**

TCBC Secretariat organized one day seminar on CBCI Dalit policy on 26<sup>th</sup> August, 2017 at Hyderabad for their regional commission secretaries and for the heads of the regional institutions. Fr. Dr. Z. Devasagayaraj, Secretary of the CBCI Office for SC/BC along with Fr. Maria Arul Raja , Director for Arul kadal Theologate, Chennai and Fr. Selvaraj Arul Nathan, Director, Indian Social Institute, Bangalore conducted the seminar.

## **14. Seminar on Dalit policy at Sambalpur**

A three-day seminar on the theme ‘Dalit Empowerment-An Ethical Imperative for a Just Odisha’ was held by Khristo Jyoti College (KJC), Regional Commission for Clergy, Priests and Religious Odisha, with the association of Odisha Forum for Social Action (OFSA) from 27-29 November 2017.

The objective of the seminar was to study and reflect the ‘Dalit Empowerment Policy (DEP) of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India (CBCI)’ in the context of the status of Dalit Christians (DP) in Odisha and to evolve strategies and action plans to address the issues that are being faced by Dalit Christians.

This was widely attended by the Bishops, heads of religious orders, provincials, institution heads, priests and nuns, theologians, and students of KJC numbering 119.

Representatives from Scheduled Caste/Backward Class (SC/BC) Commission of CBCI, OROSA, National Dalit Christian Watch (NDCW) and Jesuit-run Indian Social Institute, Bangalore were also invited as dignitaries and input providing resource persons. Most Rev. Neethinathan, Chairperson, Fr. Devasagayaraj, National Secretary and Sr. Robancy, Program Coordinator of the CBCI Office for Dalits participated in the seminar.

## **II. SC Rights of the Dalit Christians**

### **1. Meeting with Dr. Manmohan Singh:**

The Ecumenical leaders representing National Council of Churches in India and the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India met the former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and discussed about the ways and means to take forward the SC rights of the Dalit Christians.

## **2. Planning meetings for the preparation of the Rally:**

In the last meeting held on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2015 jointly organised by NCCI, CBCI office for SC/BC and NCDC it was decided to have a silent rally on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2016 to demand Scheduled Caste status to Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims.

On 11<sup>th</sup> December 2015 in the joint meeting of the representatives of CBCI, NCCI & NCDC held at CBCI Centre detail plans were made for the rally.

Again the second planning meeting was held on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2016 to know the progress of the rally and many Dalit leaders in the national level participated.

## **3. Meetings at Trichy, Tamil Nadu**

On 26<sup>th</sup> January 2016, Fr. Devasagayaraj, Secretary to CBCI Office for SC/BC participated in the meeting organised by Dalit Christians welfare society at St. Joseph's college Trichy and shared about the national rally. Around 700 people participated in the one day seminar and convention.

On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 the NCDC leaders in Tamil Nadu organized a planning meeting in preparing for the national rally which is going to be held on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2016 in which Fr. Devasagayaraj also shared about the rally and invited them in good number to Delhi.

## **4. National Silent rally on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2016**

On 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2016 in collaboration with the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) and National Council of Dalit Christians (NCDC) Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) Office for Dalits and Backward Classes organized a National Silent rally in New Delhi to demand Scheduled Caste status (for Affirmative action programs) to Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims which is denied to them since they practice Christianity and Islam.

## **5. Consultation Meeting on the SC Status to the Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims**

The representatives of National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), Catholic Bishops' of India (CBCI) and National Council of Dalit Christians (NCDC) met on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> July, 2017 at CBCI Centre, New Delhi to discuss the issues relating to Dalit Christians. The joint meeting decided to hold a Rally at New Delhi to demand the Scheduled Caste status to the Christians of Scheduled Caste origin from Government of India. It has been decided to hold in which Dalit Christians from all over the country will be participating.

The meeting was attended by Most Rev. Dr. Neethinathan, Bishop of Chingleput diocese and Chairman of CBCI Office for SC/BC and other bishops such as Most Rev. Prasad Gallela, Bishop of Cuddapah, Most Rev. Soundaraju Periyannayagam, Bishop of Vellore, Most Rev. Sarat Chandra Nayak, Bishop of Berhampur, Most Rev. Raja Rao, Bishop of Vijayawada and Rev. Fr. Devasagayaraj, Secretary, CBCI Office for SC/BC.

Mr. Samuel Jayakumar, Executive Secretary, Policy, Governance and Public witness and Mr. Raju from NCCI and Mr. Pradip Bansrior, Executive Secretary for SC/ST Commission, NCCI.

Mr. Franklin Caesar Thomas, National coordinator, NCDC, Rev. Fr. Bosco SJ, National Advisor NCDC, Mrs. Maglin Gerry, Vice President and Chairperson, Women's wing NCDC, Mr. SS Waghmare, General Secretary NCDC, Mr. VJ George, Ex-National convener and Dr. Mary John, Ex-president NCDC among others attended the meeting.

Sr. Sneha Gill, Member of Minority Commission, Government of Delhi and Rev. Fr. Victor Immanuel, Regional Secretary, SC/ST Commission, Archdiocese of Delhi and representatives from Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharastra, Punjab and other states attended the meeting.

The meeting discussed the plight and sufferings of Dalit Christians and the ways to improve their educational and economic conditions. Dalit Christians are the most neglected lot in India because of the denial of rights and privileges given to Scheduled Caste people. Therefore the meeting demanded to government of India to amend the Presidential (scheduled caste) Order 1950 para 3 and to include the Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims in the Scheduled Caste list.

#### **6. Interview in Vatican Radio and making of the Promotional video for Black Day:**

Fr. Devasagayaraj, was interviewed by the Vatican Radio in Tamil and English. The theme of the interview was the observance of Black Day. A promotional video on the Black day was prepared by Bro. Arun, SJ of Vidya jyoti college, New Delhi. The promotional video and the posters were posted in the website as well as in the social media which drew the attention of the public.

#### **7. Black day**

Throughout India Churches of all the denominations observed **August 10<sup>th</sup> as Black Day**. Meetings, rallies, demonstrations, hunger fasts, submitting memoranda, candle vigils and other forms of demonstrations were organized at the State Capitals and district headquarters by the Christian communities to show support and solidarity to the suffering Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin.

**In Delhi** Black Day was observed on **10<sup>th</sup> August**, 2017 from 4.30 to 5.30 pm at Jantar Mantar organized by CBCI, NCCI and NCDC. Most Rev. Anil Couto, Archbishop of Delhi, Mr. Alwan Masih, General Secretary of CNI other bishops and Christians leaders participated in the protest. The Memorandum was submitted to the President of India and the Prime Minister of the Country.

#### **8. Lawyers Meet on Scheduled Caste Status for Dalit Christians**

Meeting with the lawyers on SC status case was presided over by Most Rev. Neethinathan at YMCA Delhi on 10<sup>th</sup> November from 6.30 pm. The meeting was attended by Adv. Aristotle, Advocates from Alliance Defending Freedom, Adv. Franklin Caesar Thomas and other dignitaries. Advocate P.I Jose moderated the session.

## **9. E-Volunteers take up the Social Media campaign called “Dalits in Limbo” the issue of Scheduled Caste status of Dalit Christians**

Dalits in Limbo’ a social media campaign initiative was launched by Most Rev. Neethinathan, Bishop of Chingleput and Chairperson, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India (CBCI) Office for SC/BC on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2017 at 4.30 pm from Chingleput. Hundreds of people throughout the world watched it live in the Facebook account Dalit Christian CBCI. The message in the Tweeter account called **Dalits\_In\_Limbo** was also retweeted by many. A YouTube channel and Blog were also launched with the name **Dalits in Limbo**. The launch program was joined by many of the Dalits and well-wishers and as well as by the Dalits in Diaspora, who are in different parts of the world.

Dictionary meaning of Limbo: an uncertain period of awaiting a decision or resolution; an intermediate state or condition. The Dalit Christians are denied of their fundamental right to be included in the Scheduled Caste list. Thus neither they are in the SC list nor are they accepted by the caste people as their equals.

There are some wrong opinions and unnecessary fear spread against including them in the SC list. The social media called ‘Dalits in Limbo’ will clarify many of these doubts. It will also explain to the public the right of Dalits Christians to be included in the SC list.

The social media campaign is taken up by the young Dalit Christian E-Volunteers, Christians and members of the civil society organisations.

### **III.Meetings, Seminars, Trainings, and Awards**

#### **1. Entrepreneurs meet at Santhome Cathedral on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2016**

To empower the Dalit Christians the Entrepreneurs meet was organised by our office in Chennai in which around 150 Dalit Christian entrepreneurs participated.

#### **2. National Seminar and National Award on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2016**

On the occasion of the 125<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar the champion of Dalits, a National seminar was conducted and 83 Dalit Christians from all over India were given Dr. Ambedkar Award. Most Rev. Salvatore Pennachio the Apostolic Nuncio to India, His Eminence Cardinal Cleemis, President of CBCI, Most Rev. Neethinathan, Chairperson of CBCI Office for SC/BC and Mr. Prakash Ambedkar the grandson of Dr.Ambedkar were the chief guests of the program.

#### **3. PET at Kolkata on Nov 8-10 November 2016**

Pilgrimage Exposure and Training (PET) program was organised in Kolkata in the year of canonisation of St. Mother Teresa in which 63 Dalit religious and priests participated. Mass was presided over by Most Rev. Neethinathan at the tomb of St. Teresa of Kolkata.

#### **4. National Dalit Christian Women Leadership Meet 2017**

The Dalit Christian Women Leadership meet was organized at the national level by the CBCI Office for SC/BC at Indian Social Institute, Bangalore on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2017.

The purpose of the meet was to analyze the reality of Dalit Christian women, to discuss the way forward and to enhance the capacity of Dalit Christian women leadership. The program inaugurated by Fr. Selvaraj Arulnathan, Director ISI, Fr. Devasagayaraj, Secretary, CBCI Office for SC/BC, Fr. AXJ Bosco, the Former Regional Secretary for Telegu Bishop's Council, Commission for SC/ST/BC, Fr. Shaj Kumar, Regional Secretary, Sr. Robancy, Program Coordinator, CBCI Office for SC/BC and forty five Dalit women leaders from Andhra, Telengana, Kerala, Karnataka, Pune, Odisha, Tamil Nadu. It was the first meeting ever held for Dalit Christian women Leaders at the national level. This program was for the women and should emerge as leaders so that their voices be heard in the national level and help in empowering others.

In the morning session all the women shared their struggles and success stories as women leaders in the Church and the Society. Their stories inspired the other participants to enrich and encourage in their commitment as Dalit Christian women. In the afternoon, Fr. Selva gave a power point presentation explaining the importance of Dalit policy and discussed how to implement the policy.

As fruit of this one day program, Dalit Christian Women for Change (DCWC), a national level was formed and the office bearers were elected by the participants. The Office Bearers are Ms. Isabella Xavier, the President from Karnataka, Adaikala Mary Jayaraj from Tamil Nadu is the Vice – President, Sr. Saral, Secretary from Tamil Nadu, Ms. Pushpa Christy, Treasurer from Kerala, Mrs. Jayalakshmi, Representative for Andhra Pradesh, Mrs. Laxmi Kanthamma – Representative for Telengana, Mrs. Jayanti Patole – Representative for Maharastra, Ms. Smita Nayak, and Representative for Odisha.

This forum is to strengthen to focus on empowering the Dalit women and to be the voice of the women in the Church in India. Ms. Isabella gave a short speech of thanks and expressed her disposition to make this forum forward.

#### **5. TOT from August 27<sup>th</sup> Sep 4<sup>th</sup> 2016**

Training of Trainers (TOT) was organized for the first time for 9 days in New Delhi for the Dalit Christians in which the international trainers were invited with the special technique of Coaching. 26 leaders participated in the training.

#### **6. NCDC Annual Meeting:**

The National Council of Dalit Christians (NCDC) annual planning meeting and General Committee meeting took place at Sarvodaya, Mumbai on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> March 2017. His Eminence Cardinal Oswald Gracias the Archbishop of Bombay was the Chief Guest who inaugurated the program. In his inaugural address, Cardinal assured the support of the CBCI in resolving the issues of the Dalit Christians especially in demanding the religious freedom to the Dalit Christians by granting SC status to them. He said that the Church is 110 % with the Dalit Christians.

## **7. Cartoon drawing training for Dalit Christian Children**

Three days cartoon drawing training was conducted for the Dalit Christian children at Chingleput from 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> May 2017 by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) Office for Dalits and Backward Classes. 36 Dalit Christian children aged 12 to 16 from the remote villages participated in the training. Ahimsa artist Mr. Ignatius Xavier from Hyderabad trained the students. Very Rev. Fr. Bagiya Regis, Vicar General of Chingleput diocese and Fr. P. John Bosco, Pastoral Centre director and Fr. Devasagayaraj, Secretary to the CBCI Office for SC/BC inaugurated the training program at the diocesan pastoral centre. On Sunday, 28 May 2017 the cartoons drawn by the children were displayed in the Cathedral Campus which were very much appreciated by the people. Most Rev. Neethinathan the Chairperson of CBCI Office for SC/BC distributed the certificates to the students.

## **8. Evening study centres for poor Dalit children:**

CBCI Office for SC/BC is conducting evening study centres in some remote Dalit villages as the model project for others to follow and replicate. There are 15 centres where the children are guided by the animators to complete their lessons. On Saturdays they have special classes on various subjects and topics.

## **9. North Indian Catholic Dalit Leaders Meet:**

Meeting for the North Indian Dalit Leaders was held on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2017 at CBCI centre. The purpose of the meeting was to strengthen the activities of the north Indian dioceses. The leaders shared their experiences and challenges. Fr. Raj requested the leaders to promote the Dalit policy and conduct awareness programmes for the people so that it is easy to implement the policy. It was also decided to take actions with regard to the SC status case which is pending almost 13 years in the Supreme Court.

## **10. Introduction Seminar on Universal Periodic Review**

UPR introduction seminar was jointly organized by CBCI office for SC/BC and Tribal Affairs at CBCI centre from 4.30 pm to 6 pm. All CBCI office secretaries and leaders from Delhi participated. Henri Tiphange and Meha from Working Group on Human Rights (WGHR) gave a detailed introduction on Universal Periodic Review and its process.

## **11. National meet of the Dalit Christian Women for Change:**

A two day National meet and General Body meeting of Dalit Christian Women for Change (DCWC) was held in Dhyana Ashram, Chennai on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> September 2017. Delegates from different states of India participated in the program. Ms. Brinda Adige shared with them the need for the Dalit Christian women to involve in the Church and society. Fr. Thisai Gerry gave a motivational talk to assert their gifts and talents keeping in mind the uniqueness of every person to be the leader. Fr. Devasagayaraj exhorted them to actively participate in the process of implementing the CBCI Dalit Policy. Each member shared her achievements and dreams with the group.

The key decisions taken are, the need to increase awareness and to build DCWC movement across India and to work for spaces within the churches for Dalit Women in positions of decision making.

### **12. Do – No- Harm workshop MISERIOR**

A three day workshop titled Do- No- Harm workshop was organized by MISERIOR, Germany at Indian Social Institute, Delhi. It was from 21<sup>st</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2017. Elizabeth. The participants were the partners of MISERIOR from all over the country. It was the follow up program of Do- No- Harm held in Mumbai in March 2017. Elizabeth from MISERIOR, Mr. James and Mr. Suresh from CASA were the resource persons. All the participants actively participated and at the end of the workshop all were given certificates Fr. Raj and Sr. Robancy participated in the workshop.

### **13. Visit to Kandhamal and workshop in Puri**

Around 60 Dalit Priests and Religious from all over India participated in a program called PET II (Pilgrimage, Exposure and Training) organized by CBCI office for SC & BC. On 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2017 they went on a pilgrimage to Kandhamal, Odisha and experienced the misery, fear and hopelessness of the victims of violence, observing with great concern that the Christians of Kandhamal still wait for justice from the Government and court and due recognition of the martyrdom of Christians from the Church for their heroic faith.

On 29<sup>th</sup> November, 2017 the Dalit Priests and Religious gathered at Ishopanhi Ashram in Puri after the pilgrimage to Kandhamal, had one day workshop on the topic '**Call and Commitment**'. Fr. Selva, Director of Indian Social Institute, Bangalore and Fr. Nithya, Former National Secretary of CBCI Commission for Justice, Peace and Development were the Resource persons.

### **14. Recognizing Dalit Christians:**

Fr. Devasagayaraj, Secretary to the CBCI office for the SC/BC and Fr. Cosmon the former secretary received the Honorary Doctorate (Honoris Causa)

The Academy of Ecumenical Indian Theology and Church Administration conferred Honorary Doctorate (Honoris Causa) on Fr. Devasagayaraj together with Fr. Cosmon, the former secretary of the commission on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2016 for their service to the Church and society. It was indeed a great joy all us for their service to the Dalit community and their continuous service to the Church and the society.

### **15. Award for best Reporting on Dalits:**

The 22<sup>nd</sup> National Convention of Christian Journalist was organized by Indian Catholic Press Association (ICPA) in collaboration with the Archdiocese of Nagpur on 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of February 2017 at Nagpur. In this convention the annual award for best reporting on Dalits was given to Mr. Thirumani in collaboration with ICPA. A shield, certificate and cash award of Rs. 10, 000/- were given to him.

## **16. Felicitation to Sr. Anastasia Gill**

Sr. Anastasia Gill (Sneha) belongs to the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Congregation a Dalit social activist and an advocate who was appointed as the Member of the Delhi Minority Commission was felicitated by the CBCI Office for SC/BC. She is the first woman and a nun to hold this position in Delhi state.

## **17. Arjuna Awardees of Dalit Christian origin were felicitated:**

Mr. Amalraj, a table tennis player and Mr. Arokiarajiv, an athlete and a young army officer from Dalit Christian origin were given the Arjuna Award by the Honorable President of India on 29<sup>th</sup> August, 2017.

Both of them are hailing from poor families in Tamil nadu. Despite of all the difficulties they faced, both were determined to achieve in their lives by their hard work and commitment and for this, they were able to get the Arjuna Award.

On 31<sup>st</sup> August 2017 a felicitation program was organised by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) Office for Dalits and Backward Classes at CBCI Centre in which Most Rev. Theodore Mascarenhas, Secretary General of CBCI, CBCI Office secretaries, Various church leaders, Dalit organisations, Civil society organisations, and children lauded the achievements of the young awardees.

The awardees shared their experiences of their achievement, which was very inspiring to the participants especially to the future generations. Autographs of the awardees in tennis balls were gifted to the Children to encourage and motivate for the success in their lives.

## **18. National Best teacher awardee Mr. Manohar was felicitated**

Mr. Manohar, a Dalit Christian was awarded the National Best Teacher Award by the President of India on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2017. The CBCI Office for Dalits and Backward Classes together with NCDHR and National Dalit Christian Watch and other likeminded Dalit groups organized a felicitation program on 4<sup>th</sup> September. The program took place at NCDHR office. Fr. Raj and Mr. Paul Diwakar presided over the program. Mr. Manohar was accompanied by his wife Ms. Shalini Manohar.

## **19. Archbishop Oscar Romero Brilliant Star Award for Dalit nuns and Priests**

Fr. AXJ Bosco SJ, Fr. Augustine Singe, Fr. Manoj Nayak, Sr. Tilottoma Nayak and Sr. Alphonse FSAG were given Archbishop Oscar Romero Brilliant Star Award for their commitment in their ministry especially to the marginalized.

## **20. Solidarity with the Dalits and Networking with the Dalit Movements:**

### **Statement of Condemnation over the suicide of Rohith Vemula, the Dalit Scholar:**

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) Office for Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes (SC/BC) through a press statement sternly condemned the people who were responsible for the suicide of the Dalit scholar Rohith Vemula at the University of

Hyderabad hostel who killed himself on 17<sup>th</sup> January, 2016, Sunday night nearly two weeks after he and four other students were suspended by authorities and thrown out of the hostel.

#### **IV. Special events:**

##### **1. Meeting with the Apostolic Nuncio:**

On 21<sup>st</sup> March 2017, Fr. Raj and Sr. Robancy in a lunch meeting with H.E. Giambattista Diquattro, the Apostolic Nuncio to India & Nepal briefed about the Dalit Christians in India and their conditions. Rev. Msgr. Henryk Jagodzinski, First Counsellor, Charge Affairs Rev. Msgr. Mauro Lalli, First Counsellor and Rev. Msgr. Tuomo T. Vimpari, Counsellor, Ms. Chiara, Secretary to the Nuncio and others were present.

##### **2. Meeting with the students from China**

A group of students from Hong Kong group members of 8 people who were on a study trip came to the CBCI Centre on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2017. Fr. Raj and Sr. Robancy shared with them about the Dalit issues. Mr. Jayakumar organized this meeting.

##### **3. Meeting with MISERIOR Officials:**

Meeting with the representatives of Misereor on Fair Trade were held on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2017. Most Rev. Theodore, Most Rev. Neethinathan, Fr. Nicholas, Sr. Robancy, Fr. Raj with Mr. Thomas Antkowiak and Mr. Wilfried Wunden. Dalit Christians and Tribals issues were discussed.

##### **4. Dalit Liberation Sunday (DLS):**

On 11<sup>th</sup> December 2016 the Dalit Liberation Sunday was celebration on the theme “Administer Justice Daily! Deliver the Oppressed!” (Jeremiah 21:12).

The CBCI Standing committee after getting the opinion of all the bishops changed the Dalit Liberation Sunday to the second week of November. Accordingly, the Dalit Liberation Sunday was celebration on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2017 on the theme “Dalits and Religious Freedom”.

#### **V. Challenges**

- Keeping in mind the spirit of Reorganization which emphasizes the strengthening of the Regional commissions we are sorry to say that there is only one full time Regional secretary in the country. Unless there is a committed regional secretary it is difficult to take forward the CBCI Dalit Empowerment Policy. It is also the same case with the diocesan secretaries.
- Many of the Regional and diocesan commissions do not have infrastructure, personnel and financial resources to carry out the activities.
- Non acceptance of Dalit identity (lack of self-esteem) and Christian identity (to enjoy the SC status)

- Lack of Financial support for the Civil Service (IAS, IPS, IFS...) aspirants.

## **VI. Future Plans**

To organize animation and motivation programmes in order to bring better awareness among Dalits for their emancipation and empowerment; to seek the cooperation and collaboration of other CBCI Offices and organizations for this purpose;

- To help the formation of Commissions at the Regional and Diocesan levels;
- To strengthen the existing Centres for Intensive Coaching for Employment and explore the possibilities establishing Centres in other regions with local collaboration;
- To continue the struggle for equal rights for Dalit Christians in association with other Churches and various Human Rights groups
- Taking the CBCI Dalit Policy forward in all the dioceses.
- To form the Dalit entrepreneurs
- EVER : E- Volunteers- Training the youth to take up the issue of the SC status, Data bank of the Dalit Christian Human resources.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

We take this opportunity to sincerely thank all the Bishops for their good will and financial support, especially the Chairperson, Most Rev. Dr. A. Neethinathan and the Member Bishops for their inspiration, guidance and support. My hearty thanks to all the Regional Chairperson Bishops, Regional Secretaries and all the Lay leaders for their kind cooperation in the implementation of the programmes for the empowerment of Dalits and Backward Classes. We also thank all the volunteers and sponsors who help us to take forward our activities.

Fr. Devasagayaraj  
Secretary